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# You're Speculating, Jack Anderson

Jack Anderson, citing "secret documents and intelligence sources," charges 11 Soviet violations of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty Agreement of 1974 and suggests a complete U.S. inability to verify Soviet compliance with nuclear test bans ["U.S. Can't Tell If Russia Cheats on Test Ban," Aug. 10]. Since U.S. procedures for verification consist of a variety of methods that are not subject to the public domain, many of Anderson's assessments are purely speculative and narrow in scope. As one of the original authors of a new legislative initiative that is designed *to prevent nuclear testing*, I take exception to his conclusions.

An important fact that is frequently glossed over is that the Senate has yet to ratify the Threshold Test Ban. Therefore, although the Soviet Union has voluntarily stated that it would abide by the provisions of the agreement, it is by no means obligated to do so. Similarly, because the president has announced his intentions to seek renegotiation of the threshold test ban, the Soviets have little reason to believe that the United States ever intends to ratify it.

A second fact passed over by Anderson is that, because the formal instruments of ratification have yet to be exchanged, the detailed and unprecedented verification procedures established in the threshold test ban are not in effect. Under provisions established in the treaty protocol, the Soviet Union agreed to furnish geological data about test sites, as well as "yields, date, time, depth and coordinates for two nuclear weapons tests for calibration purposes." Such information is vital to the precise correlation that exists between the explosive yield and the seismic signal that is generated by an underground weapons test. By failing to ratify this agreement, the United States is denying itself the opportunity to measure accurately both the size of the Soviets' weapons tests and the sincerity of their arms control intentions.

Given our present imprecision in estimating the yield of Soviet tests, statements with respect to Soviet violations of the 150-kiloton limit should be examined carefully. The United States has not formally accused them of violating the treaty. Further, both sides agreed that, because of the technical uncertainties, one or two slight, unintended breaches of this limit per year would not be considered a violation. Obviously, however, any such violations would be cause for serious concern.

Anderson cites a Soviet test in September 1980 that "had a likely size of 350 kilotons." "Likely" is an accurate conclusion because the United States does not release yield estimates for Soviet tests. According to other press reports, however, British intelligence estimated that test to be well within the 150-kiloton limit, and, based on seismic data from the Hagfors Observatory in Sweden, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute concluded that all Soviet nuclear weapons tests during 1980 were "below or around 150 kilotons."

Anderson also refers to a Pentagon briefing that disclosed "the United States could not verify Soviet compliance with a test ban." Linking yield estimation problems with the unratified status of the threshold test ban and detection difficulties alleged to be inherent in a comprehensive test ban obscures the fundamental difference between verifying a partial and comprehensive test ban. In all significant aspects, it is much easier to verify a comprehensive test ban than it is a threshold, or partial, test ban.

In an environment in which all nuclear testing was prohibited, any event even remotely related to a nuclear test would be highly suspicious. Moreover, the Soviets have already expressed a willingness to agree to a comprehensive test ban that would be accompanied by entirely new verification procedures. During trilateral negotiations in 1980, the Soviet Union agreed to several U.S. proposals, including the installation of specially equipped, tamper-proof seismographs on Soviet territory, a moratorium on all peaceful nuclear explosions for the duration of the treaty and the use of on-site inspection to resolve suspicious events.

Finally, Anderson quotes a "highly sensitive White House report," which claims the continued testing of nuclear weapons is necessary to "verify the performance of weapons for stockpiling certification." This argument is no more than an attempt by U.S. weapons laboratories to ensure their livelihood into the next decade and beyond. A variety of nonnuclear test, such as meticulous inspection and disassembly of individual components and the remanufacture to original specifications of components, can ensure that time-tested and proven nuclear weapons designs remain operable.

The nuclear arms spiral has continued unabated for more than 37 years. A comprehensive test ban, which we know to be verifiable, represents a sound step toward the slowing and ultimate end to this costly and nonproductive spiral.

*—Berkley Bedell*

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